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Written Testimony
On behalf of the
Los Angeles Unified School District

For the hearing on
Combating Youth Violence:
What Federal, State and Local Governments are Doing to Deter Youth Crime

Submitted to the Government Reform Committee's
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources

Dan M. Isaacs
Chief Operating Officer
September 28, 2006

The Los Angeles Unified School District has many initiatives in place that address the issue of safety on our campuses. Rather than focusing on youth violence, we commit ourselves to ensuring that our campuses remain safe havens for students and staff. One of our basic tenets as a District is that all students have a right to attend campuses that are safe, secure and conducive to learning. While schools are in fact, a microcosm of the communities in which they are located, statistics show that they tend to be among the safest places in the community. For example, in the city of Los Angeles in 2004 the crime rate per 1000 was 36.4 occurrences, whereas within the LAUSD, the crime rate was 3.3 occurrences per 1000 students and employees (approximately 1 million people in total).

The LAUSD has its own School Police Department made up of over 600 sworn and civilian personnel, including more than 370 police officers. The difference between a school police department and a municipal police agency is on the focus. Whereas municipal departments focus on crime, the school police department can focus on not only the physical safety of the campuses, but also on ensuring that students learn the values of respecting themselves, their classmates and adults and the property of others. The long range goal for the District is to staff every high school with at least 2 police officers and each middle school with one. However, at this time School Police Officers are assigned to secondary schools based on crime statistics, school size, campus location and community crime factors. School Safety Officers (non-sworn personnel) are assigned based on the same information and may be funded separately by a school site. Approximately 40 officers are on patrol in fully outfitted police vehicles daily to provide services to elementary and middle schools and other sites that do not have a campus based officer. School Police Officers spend 20 weeks in a police academy then 22 weeks in field training positions and School Safety Officers receive 40 hours of training by School Police before reporting to a school site.

The strategic goals for the Department for 2006-2007 are to:

- Improve Campus Safety.
- Create a safe and tranquil school environment, free from the fear of crime.
- Protect and enhance the quality of life for all students and staff who travel to, work at, or visit our schools by delivering the highest quality of public safety services.
- Create safe passageways to and from schools.
- Improve customer service partnerships with the students, staff, and community of the LAUSD.
- Impact student learning.

During the last fiscal year the LASPD directly impacted student/staff safety in the following ways:

- Responded to 62,356 calls for service for LAUSD student/staff related issues.
- Issued 30,896 parking and traffic citations around schools impacting traffic safety.
- Filed 13,002 criminal/arrest reports for LAUSD student/staff related issues. All reports are shared with and entered into LAPD's database
- Investigated 1,300 crimes against students and staff.
- Obtained \$468,000 in restitution judgments (900% increase).

- Coordinated and facilitated 2,000 students obtaining clothing and supplies at Operation School Bell (OSB).
- Conducted parent first aid, safety, and drug/gang awareness courses for 740 parents (185 families).
- Mentored 1,440 students in the Police Activities League (PAL) and the Junior Police Academy Programs.
- Developed, implemented and maintained safe school collaborative partnerships.
- Successfully resolved several major campus walkouts, student demonstrations, and protests involving thousands of students.

The District is unique in the establishment of a Youth Relations and Crime Prevention Unit. This Unit does not provide security services, per se; yet contributes dramatically to maintaining an environment conducive to learning. It is comprised of 16 Youth Relations Assistants plus one Coordinator and Secretary. The staff members are utilized at schools throughout the city, based on need. Their goals are to promote good human relations and positive intergroup activities between students and they work closely with the City and County Human Relations Commissions, the Department of Justice, and the Probation Department. Youth Relations Assistants have developed an exemplary human relations program known as HEART—Human Efforts at Relating Together. This program is active on several middle and high school campuses and contributes to maintaining a safe environment.

Another unit which focuses on safety is the Crisis Counseling and Intervention Unit. It has several proactive initiatives as well as being galvanized when there is a traumatic event which impacts our schools. Its main functions are to:

- Create and execute the Districtwide Crisis Team training
- Secure and manage grants related to improving mental health of students
- Conduct threat assessment training for District staff members
- Provide crisis counseling and intervention support
- Develop with OEHS school safety, violence prevention and emergency preparedness materials
- Provide crisis intervention training to Local Districts

The Crisis Counseling and Intervention Unit works hand-in-hand with the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Units. The units have full complements of psychiatric social workers, physicians, nurses and other mental health professionals who work with students and their families.

Some of the key safety initiatives of the last two years are:

- \$4.3 million was allocated to provide 133 six- hour campus aide positions to our secondary schools
- Implementation of a \$.9 million grant which will provide 30 additional School Police Officers
- Doubled the Youth Relations and Crime Prevention staff, which serves a critical role in student mediation programs and working with the community
- The initiation of a collaborative safety working group, composed of representatives from LAPD, LASD, City Attorney, State Attorney General, Probation Department, Housing

Authority, MTA, LA Mayor's office, County Office of Education and others, which has undertaken a number of tasks to make our schools safer. For example—

- a) 10 school mapping, assessment and action plan based upon school community crime data
 - b) Moving of MTA bus stops that are heavily utilized by students to more secure locations nearer to the school sites
 - c) Collaborative efforts between the City, County and District to address specific school safety measures, such as designating all schools as Safe School Zones under Penal Code 626
 - d) 22 schools have local safety collaboratives composed of local agencies that deal directly with that site
- All of LAUSD crime reports are shared with LAPD
 - An enhanced working relationship with the City and County Human Relations Commissions and reestablishment of the LAUSD Office of Human Relations
 - Emphasis on the use of portable metal detectors at secondary school sites—Renewed training and distribution of a training CD
 - A request to principals to meet with students in their classrooms to address racial tolerance, multi-ethnic sensitivity and the means to settle disputes in nonviolent ways
 - Installation of additional safety enhancements at key schools, i.e., security fencing, dense shrubbery, surveillance cameras, increased night lighting.
 - The issuance of the District's Parent Student Handbook to every parent and student which includes mandate information regarding discipline infractions, the District's commitment to respectful treatment of all persons, anti-discrimination statements and student complaint procedures.
 - 58 secondary schools have a probation officer assigned to each site
 - The development of a Districtwide student behavior policy
 - A large number of Violence Prevention/Human Relations Programs that are currently in place on school sites:
 - a) Life Skills for the 21st Century (6th and 9th grade course)
 - b) Second Step Program (K-8 violence prevention curriculum)
 - c) Youth Relations Heart Program (Human Efforts at Relating Together-a proactive student mediation program)
 - d) Safe School Ambassadors
 - e) LA Bridges 1 (Gang prevention and early intervention collaboration with LA City, currently at 27 middle schools)
 - f) LA Bridges 2 (Focuses on hardcore gang members ages 14 through 24 and accesses services from agencies and community based organizations)
 - g) Gang Resistance Education and Training (middle school gang intervention program)
 - h) Rampart Division LAPD Middle School Intervention Project (at selected middle schools)
 - i) Youth Lead gang intervention program (at selected middle schools)
 - Participation in Los Angeles County Interagency Gang Task Force
 - Priority staffing program to insure that schools open with filled teaching positions and a stable substitute staff
 - Focus on selected high and middle schools to address immediate facilities and staffing issues, thereby enhancing the environment for learning

- 24 hour training for campus aides
- Districtwide theme, “Live Violence Free,” strangled in activities throughout the school year
- Our environmental safety program, which includes annual school safety inspections and published ratings, has been adopted by the Federal Environmental Protection Agency and is being used as a national model.
- Valley Youth Summit established Blue Ribbon Committees to promote positive human relations
- \$5 million was allocated this year to increase secondary campus aides from 3 or 6 hours/day to 8 hours per day with 24 hours of training and uniform
- Body armor for our School Safety Officers (non-sworn personnel)

California state regulations require that school districts maintain a climate on campus, in classrooms and at school-sponsored events and require the preparation of comprehensive safe school plans. Safe school plans deal with violence prevention, emergency preparedness, hate crimes, crisis intervention and student and employee safety and must comply with the principles of the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act. Every school in the LAUSD must submit an up-to-date safe school plan each year. This plan is to be developed by the school site council or safety planning committee and be relevant to the needs and resources of that particular school. The safe school plan must identify appropriate strategies and programs that will promote school safety and address the school’s procedures for complying with existing laws related to school safety, such as:

- Child abuse reporting procedures
- Disaster procedures
- Suspension and expulsion recommendations
- Procedures to notify teachers of dangerous pupils
- Sexual harassment policy
- Provisions of any school wide dress code
- Procedures for safe ingress and egress
- Safe and orderly environment
- Rules and procedures on school discipline

To assist schools administrators in addressing these requirements, the Office of Environmental Health and Safety has developed a template for a Model Safe School Plan. It is issued in two volumes: Volume 1—Prevention Programs; and Volume 2—Emergency Procedures. In this manner, we are assured that each school site has made the necessary preparations and implemented appropriate procedures to facilitate a safe and secure environment that is conducive to learning. In addition it ensures that should an emergency occur, schools are appropriately prepared. These safe school plans must be reviewed quarterly and updated annually.

Beyond the Bell is the District’s division that is devoted to after school and weekend enrichment, academic and sports programs. Through the myriad programs that Beyond the Bell offers, virtually every elementary and middle school student can avail themselves of a safe place with interesting activities which they can attend after school. While parents embrace the Beyond the Bell activities as a safe, extended day care program, staff views them as opportunities to ensure that students remain safe and supervised until at least 6:00 pm every day while receiving

academic support and enrichment activities. On many campuses, these programs operate during the summer months and provide meals for students.

Another area for consideration when looking at the safety umbrella is interscholastic athletics. It is critical that staff members insure the safety of students and spectators as they participate in athletics and attend athletic events. Administrators have a manual which identifies appropriate responsibilities related the athletic safety. When considering appropriate supervisory and police personnel at an event, several factors must be considered, such as:

- Number of spectators expected
- Past rivalry
- Recent neighborhood problems
- Time of game
- Egress of buses from stadium
- Campus Officers' recommendation

While any crime committed in or near a school site is unacceptable, the LAUSD remains committed to providing safe environments for students and staff. We are proud that our increasing test scores are reflective of efforts which ensure that students and staff feel comfortable and secure at school and therefore able to concentrate on their academic achievement. Our proactive, preventative strategies have resulted in several decreases in crimes on school sites in the past two years. Some examples are:

- Decreased assaults with deadly weapons by 11.36%
- Decreased batteries by 4.81%
- Decreased homicides by 75%
- Decreased bomb threats by 37.93%
- Decreased robberies by 20.26%
- Decreased sex offenses by 21.77%
- Decreased criminal threats by 16.11%
- Decreased threats against school employees by 42.11%
- Decreased arsons by 6.35%
- Decreased burglaries by 20.18%
- Decreased thefts by 25.11%
- Decreased incidents of vandalism by 5.74%